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van Rossum, J.H.A.

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Jacques H. A. van Rossum

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Talented in Dance: the Bloom Stage Model revisited in the personal histories of dance students

JACQUES H. A. VAN ROSSUM

Bloom (1985) reported on the careers of a sample of 120 talented individuals from three domains: science, athletics and the arts. His findings are used as a starting point for the research on professional dance students presented in this article. Three issues were studied: the relevance of significant others in a dance career; the issue of detecting dance talent and, also, using Bloom's proposed three career stages in a talent domain, how teachers are described by students, and what the characteristics of a typical dance class are. A questionnaire was constructed and administered to 129 students in the Dance Department at the Amsterdam School of the Arts, the Netherlands. The results indicate that, in addition to the dance teacher and parents (as highlighted in Bloom's study), peers should also be considered. Furthermore, the majority of students have been labelled "talented" at some point in their career, notably by teachers and other dance experts, while in fact parents played no role here. A new measurement format was introduced in an attempt to reveal the peculiarities of teacher and dance class during the three career stages. The results obtained correspond to Bloom's findings. Therefore, the present study not only supports Bloom's findings in a dance sample, but also offers a generalisation from Bloom's male-dominated sample to a female-dominated one.

Introduction

In a now classic study, Bloom (1985) studied the careers of 120 talented individuals, coming from three domains of pursuit: the arts, science and athletics. As a result, Bloom was led to distinguish three stages in the career of the talented individual: In the "early years" (the First Stage), the individual is lured into the talent domain. In the "middle years" (the Second Stage), the individual becomes committed to the domain, and finally—during "the later years"—makes the domain the centre of his/her life (the Third Stage).

The notion of career stages has been attractive to other researchers also. However, sometimes the same notion is expressed using different terminology: Initiation,

Author's address: Jacques H. A. van Rossum, Faculty of Human Movement Sciences, Vrije Universiteit, Van der Boechorststraat 9, NL-1081 BT Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the mentor/teacher/coach and of the parents, at each of the three stages of the career of a talented individual (after Bloom, 1985, in Régnier *et al.*, 1993, p. 296)

	Stage One ("Early years", Initiation)	Stage Two ("Middle years", Development)	Stage Three ("Later years", Perfection)
Talented person	Joyful, playful, excited, "special"	"Hooked", committed	Obsessed, responsible
Mentor/teacher/coach	Kind, cheerful, caring, process-centred	Strong, respecting, skilled, demanding, emotionally bonded	Successful, respected/feared
Parents	Shared excitement, supportive, sought mentors, positive	Made sacrifices, restricted activity	

development and perfection (or mastery) have also been used to indicate Bloom's stages.

His study also highlights the significance of the mentor, teacher or coach (depending upon the terminology commonly used in a specific domain), as well as the role of the parents. Bloom's research showed that the talented individual does not reach an exceptionally high level of performance alone. There are always significant others to give advice, support, and companionship along the way. According to Bloom, the roles and tasks of the mentor/teacher/coach, and of the parents, differ depending on the career stage of the talented person. This is succinctly summarised by Régnier *et al.* (1993), for example, in their outline of the process of talent development in athletics (see Table 1).

It is remarkable—and not an error of any kind—that parents supposedly do not play any role in the third stage of their talented children's career. According to the information provided by Bloom's subjects, all of them US citizens, the area at the bottom right of Table 1 is not blank by accident. This area, however, was filled in with various parental roles when a large sample of Dutch athletes was questioned. These athletes, being members of a national squad (judo, speed skating, swimming, table tennis), were presumed to be in the third stage of their athletic career. They were asked about the roles their parents had played during the preceding 12 months. A series of important parental roles were pointed out: financial assistance, household organisation, transportation, presence at games and moral support (van Rossum, 1995). Parents might thus very well be "present" in the third career stage, although they mostly play a background role.

In an attempt to offer an explanation for the evident difference between the Dutch athletic sample and the lack of parental roles in Bloom's US sample, it was noted that the majority of the Dutch athletes still lived at home with their parents. Therefore, these athletes were much more dependent upon their parents compared to the American athletes of Bloom's sample, who presumably were all living at a college campus, possibly hundreds of miles away from their parents' place of residence. This empirical fact illustrates that the findings reported by Bloom (1985)

must not be taken for granted. They should be put to the test. There is also at least one highly relevant methodological reason to do so. Bloom's description of career is based on a *retrospective* analysis. Such a qualitative analysis (Bloom employed interview data as his main source), ultimately relies on the memory of those who at one time in their life ranked "among the top-25 in the U.S." (p. 538). Bloom's findings, therefore, are probably best considered as hypotheses. As such, they should be tested in different contexts: in different cultures and in different talent domains. One might also consider keeping the time span between the actual event/s and date of recollection as short as possible, considering a longitudinal research design as an ultimate and preferable solution.

The present article focuses on some of Bloom's (1985) findings, and endeavours to find empirical support for them in the world of dance and in a Dutch context. This is not the world of top-level sports (Bloom studied world-class tennis players and Olympic swimmers), nor is it the artistic world of concert pianists or sculptors (also among Bloom's subjects), and it certainly does not relate to the world of science (represented in Bloom's sample by mathematicians and neurologists). Each of these three domains (athletics, arts, science) has its peculiar and specific characteristics. The present article focuses on dance. This domain whether it is ballet (or academic dance) or modern dance, demands the ability for movement-based artistic interpretation of a choreographer's intentions. One might therefore view the domain of dance as a combination of elements and characteristics found in the domain of athletics and in that of the performing arts, both of which were included in Bloom's study.

The present study asked dance students to reconstruct their own dance history. In an extended questionnaire, students were also asked a number of questions about teacher behaviour. The original study was designed to chart both students' and teachers' view of the dance teacher, both in terms of the "ideal dance teacher" and dance teachers' everyday behaviour in the dance studio (van Rossum, 1998, 2000). In order to be able to survey students' background, questions were asked about their dance history. The article reports on a number of these "background questions", examined here in the context of the three following issues.

The first issue focuses on significant others in a career. In Bloom's study, it appears fairly easy to discern the important persons in the career of a talented individual. The mentor/teacher/coach is the individual with expertise within the talent domain. The parents are also of significance, given their role in supporting the individual in several ways. Parents play a major background role. Bloom's report has very little to say about the role of colleagues or peers. In a study of Dutch athletes, fellow athletes were considered important too, even in the context of so-called individual sports (van Rossum, 1995). The following questions were posed in the present research: are parents and teachers considered significant others in a dance career; should people other than parents and teachers be included amongst significant others?

The second issue concerned a number of facts pertaining to the dance career. When were the first dance classes taken? From what age onwards did dance become something to be taken seriously? At what age was the decision made to become a professional dancer? In other words, how many years did the first and the

second career stage take? In addition, was each of the students labelled "talented"? The talented individuals studied by Bloom and his co-workers indicated that they were considered "special" (cf. Table 1) in the first stage of their career. Does this observation also apply to dance students, and is it limited to the first career stage? More specifically, one might wonder whether the individual has explicitly been told that she or he was gifted or talented. If so, at what age, by whom, and what constituted the gift? The answers to these questions may be helpful in roughly sketching a career pattern by ordering some of the individual's highlights chronologically.

As a third and central aspect of the current study, an attempt was made to sketch an outline of the typical dance teacher in the various stages of a dance career. Taking Bloom's descriptions of mentor/teacher/coach roles and tasks as starting points (cf. Table 1), a list of items was constructed, which might assist dance students to characterise their teacher and the dance classes. Of interest was whether the dance climate during the various stages of the dance career correlated with Bloom's qualifications, and whether this manifested itself in both the characteristic features ascribed to the dance class as well as in those ascribed to the dance teacher.

The main objective of this study was to find out whether or not Bloom's findings are also valid for a career in the world of dance.

Method

Participants

The participants studied all attend a school for higher education in the Netherlands and formally study dance with the aim of becoming professional dancers. In general, children start taking dance classes while in elementary school ("the early years", according to Bloom), become committed in their adolescent years (in the early years of secondary school), and commence professional dance studies around the age of 18. In the Netherlands, a professional dance course (as one of the branches of Dutch higher education) generally takes 4 years, and usually begins directly after secondary school at the age of 18 or 19. Candidates must audition prior to enrolment at a dance department of a school of the arts.

In the present study, participants all studied at the Dance Department of the Amsterdam School of the Arts (in Amsterdam, the Netherlands). This particular institution offers five study routes: three different routes for those who aspire to a professional dance career (classical ballet, modern dance, jazz and show musical dance), one route for those who intend to become a so-called "independent dance artist" ("School for New Dance Development") and one route for those who wish to train to become dance teachers. Note that also in the latter two routes, a strong emphasis is placed on active dance involvement.

A majority of students in the Dance Department participated in the study ($n = 129$, which equals 65% of the total number of 199 students across the four years of study). Participation rates were especially high in the first and second year. However, it turned out to be difficult to gain the participation of fourth-year

students. They were only occasionally in the building because they were involved in a 6-month apprenticeship period as part of their scheduled studies. Of the 129 students, 103 were female (79.8%) and 26 male (20.2%). The average age of the subjects was 22.1 years (SD = 3.1). The oldest subject was 35 years of age and the youngest 17. The large majority of the participants were 20–21 years old.

A dance student spends an average of 26.06 hours (SD = 8.4) per week in the studio taking dance classes. These hours do *not* include theory class time, nor general (physical) preparation before dance classes, travel to and from school or other things related to their training. Dance classes are dispersed over an average of 14 sessions throughout the week (SD = 4.3). Further, a student needs time for travel to and from the institution/classes, injury treatment, short breaks and so on. According to students, such activities take on average 7.5 hours per week (SD = 5.9). Nearly all students live in Amsterdam or in its vicinity, and most of them live on their own and prepare their own meals. To complete the outline of an average week, that is, a week without performances, about 50% of the students have additional activities that demand physical activity and/or physical effort. While one half of the participating students indicated being active in the dance studies only, the other half of the group responded that they were involved in additional activities for an average of 4.8 hours per week (SD = 4.2). For some extra-curricular activities are necessary to earn money (such as waiting on tables or working as a go-go dancer in a disco), while for others it constituted supportive training for dance (cardiovascular and/or fitness exercise like going to a gym, jogging, pursuing other sports activities or taking special classes relevant to a dance career, such as courses in the Alexander technique).

Questionnaire

A 21-page questionnaire was constructed for the purpose of the project. Note, however, that this substantial collection of items also included three psychological tests. While the tests were of major importance to the central aim of the project (a description of the students' view of the dance teacher), they have no relevance for the part of the study presented in this article.

This study reports on questions in the questionnaire which addressed the individual students' personal dance history. These were indicated earlier as "background information". Questions were asked pertaining to the dance class, the dance teacher, amount of time spent taking classes and being considered "special" by the teacher. They were posed in reference to three stages of their development towards becoming professional dancers:

(a) the beginning period of their dance career;
(b) the period in which dance was chosen as a primary activity in addition to secondary school education (for most students, this means being a student at a preliminary dance course during the adolescent years), and
(c) during their professional study, that is, while a student at the Dance Department of the Amsterdam School of the Arts.

In Bloom's (1985) description of the career of a talented individual, period (a) is similar to the First Stage ("the early years"), period (b) to the Second Stage ("the middle years"), and period (c) to the early part of Bloom's Third Stage ("the later years").

While most questions have been addressed in earlier studies with athletic samples (van Rossum, 1995, 1997), a new measurement format was employed in an attempt to discover the characteristics of the dance class as well as of the dance teacher. Although the list of items was different with regard to both (consisting of 22 and 18 items respectively, see Tables 4 and 5 for the complete sets of items), the list was identical for each stage of the career. The contents of the items were inspired and shaped by the findings of Bloom (1985) and were checked with experts in the field of dance (i.e. dance teachers, artistic directors and dance faculty) to yield the two sets of items.

Participants were instructed to mark each feature on the list, which in her/his view characterised the class or the teacher. It was made clear that more than one of the items might be marked. At the bottom of the list, students were prompted to add one or two features which they considered additionally relevant. This option, however, was used only rarely. The expectation was that the indicated items would give an appropriate description of both the teacher and her/his classes. The percentage of students who chose a particular item is believed to indicate the relevance of that particular item.

The questionnaire was completed by the participants in the presence of the author during a regular theory-oriented 60-minute class. This took place during the early spring (in the Netherlands, the school year starts in August/September and ends in June/July). The foreign students at the Dance Department were given an English version of the questionnaire. The Dutch version of the questionnaire was completed by 68% of the subjects. As no significant differences were found in preliminary analyses which compared answers from the Dutch and English versions of the questionnaire, the data from the two versions have been pooled.

Data were subjected to a frequency analysis and results are outlined in the following as descriptive percentages.

Results

Significant Others

In order to find out who the dancers' significant others were, they were asked, "In your opinion, who are the most important persons in your dance career?" The results are presented in Table 2.

While the dance teacher is considered by far the person of most influence in a dance student's career, parents too clearly play a role of importance. These results confirm Bloom's description. However, friends and other dance students as significant others should also be noted. The fact that they were nominated as such by one out of every three students indicates their importance. In the category "others in the world of dance", students mention individuals such as teachers of special

Table 2. Significant others during the dance career. Note that more than one of the alternatives given could be chosen

Significant others	Percentage (n = 129)
Friends	37.2
Parents	52.7
Other relative(s)	11.6
Other dance students	30.2
Dance teacher(s)	78.3
Other(s) in the world of dance	17.1
Other(s)	17.8

and/or supportive classes (for example in the Alexander technique), choreographers, dancers from dance companies, dance idols and dance performers. The "other(s)" category includes people like the local amateur dance teacher, persons met during dance summer courses, musicians, but also, interestingly, "me/myself".

In summary, findings indicate that, at least within the dance domain, the category of "peers" should be added to Bloom's (1985) inventory of mentor/teacher and parents as significant others.

The Dance Career in Facts and Figures

The second issue of the study addressed some factual as well as subjective information about the dancer across the stages of a career. This should help in outlining a career perspective by means of the following questions: when did it start; how many hours of practice were used; was she/he ever told that she/he was talented; in which area of dance was she/he particularly gifted; who first detected the talent; at what age did she/he know that she/he wanted to pursue a professional dance career; and, no less important, was she/he considered "special" by the dance teacher—as Bloom (1985) suggested?

The majority of the participants did start taking ballet/dance classes before the age of 10 although some started much later (M = 10.2, SD = 5.8, the age ranges from 3 to 33 years of age). The average starting age, however, is strongly biased by the students of the School for New Dance Development (SNDD). While these students said they had their first dance class at the average age of 15.6 years, the average age for the other four groups within the sample varied from 5.3 to 10.6 years.

At the beginning of their training, students spend about 4 hours (M = 3.98, SD = 4.6) in the dance studio, taking three classes per week (M = 3.0, SD = 3.6), although the amount of time spent and number of classes taken vary considerably between individuals.

The beginning of the second career stage was studied by asking participants at which age they started to practise dance/ballet more seriously. The average age was 14.9 years (*SD* = 5.0, ranging from 6 to 33). Again, the average age is biased by the SNDD subgroup. While their average age was 20.4, the average age of the

other four subgroups varied between 8.0 and 15.0. In this period of the career, the number of hours per week spent in the dance studio is 10.9 (SD = 6.8), averaging a dance class every day of the week, including the weekend (M = 6.97, SD = 4.1).

When asked at which age they knew they wanted to enter higher level dance studies, the average age for the whole sample was 15.4 years, although again, this average is biased by the higher starting ages of the SNDD students. The SNDD students average an age of 21.8 years, while the mean ages for the other four subgroups varied from 9.8 to 17.1 years. These results suggest that already during the second career stage, students were determined to attend professional dance training aiming for a professional career.

When asked, "Have you ever been told that you have talent for dance/ballet?", the large majority answered yes (91.5%), as might have been expected. However, 11 students (8.5%) were apparently never told so! Those who answered in the affirmative indicated that on average they were told at the age of 11.9 years (SD = 4.5), with a range from 3 to 23 years, although ages between 8 and 16 were most frequent.

The group of students who had been told that they had talent for dance ($n = 118$) were asked, "who told you that you were talented?"; there were four alternative answers: (a) parents, (b) dance teacher at the time, (c) fellow student(s) at the time, and (d) somebody else. By far, the dance teacher was chosen most often (80.5% of the students), while parents and other students were not chosen as frequently (16.1% and 13.6% respectively). The alternative answer, "somebody else", was chosen in 19.5% of the cases. In about half of these (54.5%), it was someone in the immediate social context of the student (friend, relative, acquaintance). In the remaining cases (45.5%), the label "somebody else" turned out more unexpectedly to be audience, critics or professional performers. Comparing these two groups which answered 'somebody else' regarding the ages at which the label was given (one might think that one needs to be a bit older in order for outside experts to detect the talented individual), no statistically significant differences were actually found. Mean ages were 12.5 (SD = 6.1) and 14.1 (SD = 4.3) in each of the groups respectively.

The students that were told they possessed talent for dance, however, were also asked to describe their talent in their own words. Did they possess physical aptitude or were they mainly artistically/expressively gifted? Only 11% of the subgroup reported that they had been told they possessed physical aptitude, and 42% said they had been told their talent was one of expressiveness ("a stage personality", as some students wrote), while 36% indicated they had been told they had both physical aptitude and were artistically gifted. The remaining 11% mentioned various reasons such as a "good memory for movement patterns", "a fast learner", "good motivation" and "enormous willpower".

One of the questions asked, in relation to both the first and the second career stages, dealt with the feeling of getting special treatment as a student: "At the time, were you under the impression that your dance teacher thought you were a special student?" The responses are presented in Table 3.

About half of the students recall being treated as special students in their early

Table 3. Percentages of students who were labelled "special". Figures indicate the percentage of dance students who ticked the item ($n = 129$)

A special student?	First stage ("early years")	Second stage ("middle years")
No, never	16.8	12.6
Sometimes	34.4	37.0
Yes, mostly	36.8	36.2
Yes, always	12.0	14.2
Total	100	100

dance classes. No differences were observed between the first and the second stage. One might have thought that in the local ballet school (that is, during the first stage of the career), those who now pursue a professional dance career would have stood out above the rest. As far as they remember, however, these students do not recall being treated as special students during the first stage any more than during the second stage, though by then they must have been surrounded by many other talented individuals.

As indicating "being special", students mentioned, for example, the following: being chosen for the important roles in a piece (often the solo part); receiving extra free classes; helping the teacher in class with younger children; and receiving more attention from the teacher in class. The latter may be illustrated by examples such as being in the first row during practice, being asked to show something to the others in class, being complimented regularly, being corrected much more often than others, or sometimes just standing out: "I was the only boy".

To summarise, the first stage roughly starts during the time of primary school and extends into the secondary school years. This career stage—between the ages of 10 and 15—takes about 5 years on average to complete. During this period of introduction to dance (the "early years", as Bloom [1985] termed them), the majority of the students were labelled "gifted" for the first time and most often by a local dance teacher. In most cases, the label was based on artistic qualities, although the physical aptitude for dance was certainly not neglected. After entering the second career stage (the "middle years" in Bloom's stage model), the student often did not need many more years before making up her/his mind about pursuing a professional dance career. By then, the number of dance classes increased from three to seven per week; that is, about three times as many hours in the dance studio (by now, an average of about 11 hours per week). After entering the third career stage ("the later years", in Bloom's terminology), the student's everyday life becomes completely filled with dance. At an average age of 22, the student has been involved with dance and dance training for about 10 years, and is determined to dedicate the ensuing career stage to the pursuit of becoming a professional dancer.

Characteristic Features of Dance Classes and Dance Teacher

A dance student has taken hundreds of dance classes and has encountered many a teacher during their 10-year pursuit towards becoming a professional dancer. The next issue in the present study was a systematic mapping of the qualities of the classes they took and of the teachers of these classes. The objective was to find similarities and differences between classes and teachers across the three career stages. Note, however, that as dance classes might take various forms, the contents of these classes have been described in general terms.

Characteristics of dance classes. Dance students were asked to characterise dance classes at three different stages during their career. The same list of 18 items was used each time. The student marked each item relevant as a characteristic of the dance class in question.

First, the dance classes at the beginning of the dance career were outlined. Table 4 shows the results, expressed in percentage of subjects who identified with the item. Adopting 33.3% as an arbitrary, but feasible, criterion, the initial classes appear to be characterised by mainly six characteristics as expressed by the administered items: Motivating, Cosy, Playful, Inspiring, Disciplined and Geared towards improvement. According to questions put to the dance students, these classes were taken when the student was between 10 and 15 years of age, taking an average of three classes per week (that is, about 4 hours of dance practice per week). The sketch of the initial dance classes is rather similar to the keyword description of the First Stage as presented by Bloom (cf. Table 1).

During the Second Stage, when participants had started practising dance/ballet more seriously; that is, after the age of 15 ("middle years"), the typical dance class was characterised differently: Geared towards improvement, Disciplined, Hard work, Motivating, Structured, Working for yourself, Inspiring and Fanatical. Note that during this stage, students engage in 11 hours of dance practice on average per week, spread over seven classes.

As dancers reach stage three (i.e. higher dance studies during the "later years"), dance classes are characterised roughly the same as during stage two. Since the dance curriculum includes different types of dance classes, students were asked to characterise those classes she/he believed were most important to her/his own dance development. As indicated in Table 4, these classes are characterised by seven items: Geared towards improvement, Hard work, Working for yourself, Structured, Disciplined, Motivating and Inspiring.

Clearly, something happens to the dance class during a dance career. The most dramatic change appears to occur between the first and the second stage of the career: from having been Motivating, Cosy and Playful, the dance class becomes Disciplined, Geared towards improvement and Hard work. It continues to be Motivating, however. The main characteristics of the second stage are observed in the third stage also.

One is inclined to think that, after the step of committing oneself to further dance studies has been taken, the atmosphere of the dance classes remains more or

Table 4. Characteristic features of dance classes across the three-stage dance career: in the beginning ("the early years"), during the years of commitment ("the middle years") and during higher professional studies ("the later years"). Percentages signify the relative number of students who chose a given item ($n = 129$)

Characteristic of dance class	First stage ("early years")	Second stage ("middle years")	Third stage ("later years")
Relaxed	24.8	13.2	24.8
Structured	28.7	50.4	62.8
Cosy	40.3	20.2	12.4
Little attention paid to me	4.7	6.2	9.3
Playful	38.8	5.4	9.3
Safe in the group	16.3	13.2	16.3
Working for yourself	17.8	48.8	65.1
Disciplined	34.1	76.0	53.5
Not nice	0.8	5.4	3.9
Geared towards improvement	34.1	76.0	76.0
Hard work	29.5	71.3	67.4
Noisy	7.0	1.6	1.6
Fanatical	24.8	40.3	24.8
Informal	18.6	8.5	7.0
Chaotic	3.9	3.9	8.5
Inspiring	37.2	41.1	38.0
Got a "kick out of it"	25.6	33.3	14.7
Motivating	54.3	62.8	47.3

less the same. The playful, "cosy" work climate of the first stage has gone, and does not return. It should, however, also be said that, in general, dance classes seem to be characterised by four elements irrespective of the career stage: Motivating, Geared towards improvement, Disciplined, and Inspiring.

Characteristics of the dance teacher. The dance teacher was characterised following a similar procedure, again in comparison with the three stages of the dance career. A list of 22 items was used (Table 5).

During the first stage (i.e. "the early years'), the dance teacher could generally be described by the following items: Geared towards pleasure in dancing, Took interest in both the dancer and the person, Was positive, Supportive and Motivating. Most of these qualities do not disappear during the course of the career, although sometimes a quality becomes less prominent. One example of such a "disappearing" quality would be "Geared towards pleasure in dancing". Another illustration of this phenomenon is the dance teacher's interest in the dancer as a person. New features, however, appear to unfold as the career progresses. The number of items which qualify, in accordance with the arbitrary criterion of 33.3%, that describe the typical dance teacher in the second and third stage is 12 and 10, respectively. Of these, nine are descriptive of both stages, namely, Took interest in me as a dancer, Geared towards future profession, Motivating, Supportive, Positive, Inspiring, as well as Very critical and Geared towards discipline and Geared towards pleasure in dancing.

Table 5. Characteristic features of the dance teacher across the three-stage dance career: in the beginning ("the early years"), during the years of commitment ("the middle years") and during higher professional studies ("the later years"). Percentages signify the relative number of students who chose a given item ($n = 129$)

Characteristic of of the dance teacher	First stage ("early years")	Second stage ("middle years")	Third stage ("later years")
Relaxed	23.3	14.7	34.1
Geared towards pleasure in dancing	64.3	36.4	39.5
Geared towards future profession	14.7	58.1	64.3
Supportive	43.4	50.4	45.0
Inspiring	28.7	41.1	36.4
Very critical	15.5	47.3	37.2
Authoritarian	16.3	30.2	13.2
Passionate	25.6	33.3	27.1
Distant	9.3	11.6	20.2
Role model/ideal	26.4	21.7	12.4
Protective	16.3	10.0	5.4
Strict	20.2	48.8	30.2
Tough/uncompromising	6.2	10.9	7.0
Unclear	0.8	3.9	11.6
Positive	46.5	44.2	42.6
Complimentary	17.8	14.0	20.2
It's never any good	2.3	7.8	7.0
Geared towards discipline	26.4	43.4	34.1
Boring	2.3	3.9	7.8
Motivating	39.5	51.9	44.2
Took interest in me as a person	41.9	38.0	27.1
Took interest in me as a dancer	48.8	62.0	69.0

Here again, there appears to emerge a qualitative difference in teacher behaviour after the first stage.

During the later stages, the dance teacher has become more interested in the dancer, is especially geared towards the professional future of the student, stresses discipline, and is very critical, while continuing to be motivating, inspiring and positive. This suggests that the transition between the first and the second stage is an abrupt one. While pleasure does not completely disappear, it has been "defeated" by rather functional, result-oriented teacher qualities. The teacher in the second and third stage shows that she/he is interested in the dancer training for a professional career, not necessarily in the individual who dances.

Types of dance classes in the first and second stage. The changes between the first and second career stage with regard to both the typical dance class and the typical dance teacher might possibly be associated with, and result from, the rather different contents of the instruction offered. In order to investigate this possibility, dance students were asked to indicate the emphasis in these classes. Three alternatives were given: classical ballet, modern dance, or jazz ballet/dance. Participants were

Table 6. Characteristic contents of dance classes during the first and second stage of the dance career. Percentages signify the relative number of students who chose a given item ($n = 129$). Note, however, that there were 39 and 50 respondents for each stage respectively regarding "Other emphases" and that percentages are calculated on these numbers for the additional items. Frequencies for these in parentheses

Emphasis in classes	First stage ("early years")	Second stage ("middle years")
Classical ballet	64.3	79.8
Modern dance	18.6	44.2
Jazz ballet/dance	27.9	39.5
Other emphases		
General dance education	21 (8)	0
Folk dance/Folklore	15 (6)	26 (13)
Latin/Afro/Tap	18 (7)	22 (11)
Improvisation/Charactère	5(2)	20 (10)
Show ballet	5 (2)	4 (2)
Ballroom	8(3)	2(1)
Children's dance	13(5)	0
Other	15(6)	26(13)

also allowed to signify any other possible emphasis. Table 6 shows the results pertaining to the classes in the first and second stage respectively.

It is clear that, according to the dance students, in both the initial classes as well as during the second stage, the main emphasis in a dance class is on classical ballet. The norm for any study of dance, therefore, would appear to be the classical ballet class. In the second career stage, dance classes emphasising modern or jazz dance are added. However, the classical ballet class remains the most important class.

During the first stage of the dance career, many students who marked the "other emphases" category, refer to classes offered as a general introduction to the domain of dance. While such classes are not offered during the second career stage, an increase is found in modern dance and jazz dance classes, while folk dance, improvisation and specific dance forms like Latin American dance, African dance and tap dance are also mentioned. In general, however, dance classes during the two early stages of the dance career are clearly oriented towards ballet.

Conclusions

While the significance of theorising about the life and career of talented individuals cannot be denied, not much empirical work has been done based on Bloom's (1985) pioneering and innovative work. This article reported an empirical study within the context of dance. As it appears, the descriptions of the typical characteristics of the dance teacher and the dance class generally correspond to the outline of the tasks and roles of the mentor/teacher/coach provided by Bloom.

It is customary within the dance domain (at least in the Netherlands) that when

a young child chooses a career in dance, she/he transfers from a local amateur ballet dance school to preparatory dance studies at a special ballet school, combining school and dance studies. After finishing the preparatory years, professional studies follow at an institution for higher education. This means that, in the Netherlands, a dancer has in fact started training for a profession at the age of 10! About 10 years later, she/he may have reached a level of skill and artistry which will allow for becoming a professional dancer in ballet, modern dance or jazz and theatre dance.

A dance career is tough, plagued with injuries and physical discomfort (Brinson & Dick, 1996). It is therefore likely that the career of a number of dance students who participated in the study—successfully finishing their professional dance education—will never really "take off". In a way, this makes the present group of research participants very different from Bloom's (1985) group, which consisted of successful individuals who "made it to the top". His description of the routes taken by talented individuals, however, does not differ much from that of the dance students. The fact that these students are en route to becoming professional dancers might make them, as a group, very comparable to Bloom's sample. In Bloom's study, professionals abound. At one point in their younger years, they must have opted for a career as a professional tennis player, a concert pianist, a sculptor or a scientist, just as the dance students in the present study did.

The present study supports Bloom's findings regarding the importance of significant others. These are present also for students in the domain of dance. While the teacher turned out to be the most significant person in the career of a dancer, parents also appeared to be of consequence. In addition to these significant others, it was observed in research with Dutch athletic samples (van Rossum, 1995) that team members also were judged as important by the athletes. The present study of dancers again suggests the importance of peers. This finding regarding the importance of peers in the talent development process is not surprising. But there appears to be nearly no empirical data available on this issue. A recent study in which qualitative information was gathered on the roles of peer relationships in the talent domains of athletics and the arts (Patrick *et al.*, 1999) is likely to be one of the first scientific investigations on this aspect of development. More research is needed. In this context, locker room conversation might be a valid and rich source of information and not merely be manifestations of companionship and envy. Such information might also make clear how solutions to certain problems may be arrived at. In her autobiographical novel, *Prologue*, Joan Brady (1995) describes the following scene at the local San Francisco Ballet School. Note that the first edition was published in 1982, under the title *The Unmaking of a Dancer*:

> At the Basic 4 level, I had one class on pointe a week; it lasted an hour and a half, which can seem a very long time when the skin of the toes is rubbing against a harshly textured, glue-stiffened brace. I wore no lamb's wool to lessen the friction; it wasn't done. Suki [another dance pupil, JvR's comment] said so. "It makes you weak," she said. "And besides, you can't feel what you're doing." I could feel the blisters that resulted, though; they ranged from small white swellings of watery matter to half-dollar-size

> blood-filled bladders to the angry, bleeding sub-skin of the burst blister. After class, blood-strained tights and blood-soaked shoes were exposed and commented on. No tears were shed, but special fortitude drew special notice; the atmosphere was offhand Spartan. Suki taught me to cut away what remained of the blister's covering vesicle and sprinkle the subskin with a vicious, iodine-laden stuff called D. P. T. Powder. The pain was enough to make the victim giddy, but it was the custom, as Suki made plain, to perform the surgery publicly, soundlessly, in the waiting room along with fellow sufferers and assorted onlookers. (pp. 16–17)

With respect to the second issue of the present article, the findings point to the fact that one has to be knowledgeable about the talent domain in order to be able to call someone talented or gifted. A similar finding was reported in a study on Dutch athletes. These 194 athletes, each a member of a Dutch national squad, report that they were identified as talented athletes by coaches and other "experts" in their specific sport (van Rossum, 1995). While Bloom (1985, p. 296) remarks that parents noticed "specialness or giftedness" in their child, this is clearly not enough to identify talent, whether in the domain of dance or athletics.

However, being labelled talented or gifted is not always something to be grateful for. In a review of the literature on the highly able, Freeman (1998) warns against the discouragement which might be related to too high an expectation, while she also asks for more research on the effects of labelling children gifted or talented. In the dance group, a little less than 10% of the students said that they had never been told (or never even heard) that they showed "dance talent". At the present state of scientific knowledge, therefore, this need not necessarily be considered a disadvantage!

Bloom's (1985) three stages of a career in a talent-driven domain are generally accepted. Within the domain of athletics, however, there have been a few voices arguing a fourth stage also; one that starts after ending an active career (Scanlan *et al.*, 1989). Salmela (1994) proposes to add a Retirement stage. Furthermore, in a study describing the US world of figure skating, based on Bloom's notions and method, even a fifth stage is proposed: a stage in which one returns to the talent domain, for example, in the role of trainer or coach (Scanlan *et al.*, 1989). The present study, however, indicates that Bloom's three stages offer a valid way to describe a dance career.

There are definite changes in the life of a young adult as she/he commences secondary school, and as well as entering an institution of higher education. At the same time, not too many changes seem to occur in the realm of the dance studio during the second and third career stage. Following the transition into the second career stage, both the dance class and the dance teacher appear generally to be present in a mainly functional role. Although the workload for the dance student certainly increases during the course of the career (probably demanding a new attitude by the student), no fundamental changes seem to emerge in the way that dance classes are taught. These findings, therefore, might suggest that the participating group of dance students is less than optimal for a description of the typical dance

class and the typical dance teacher of the third stage. While a case can be made for the present sample of dance students as just having crossed the threshold to the third career stage, some might prefer to let the third stage commence a few years later, for example, at the time of first signing a contract with a professional dance company. From the latter perspective, the transition from secondary school to full-time study in higher education could be considered just another step within the second stage of the career. Taking this view, it would make sense that the characteristics of the dance class and the dance teacher basically converge.

While the difficulty in pinpointing the exact transition from second to third stage might be resolved in a study of professional dancers, one might also turn to Stambulova's (2000) work on the athletic career. Using the concept of "crisis" as a departure, various turning points in a career are described. Based on her work with Russian athletes, Stambulova distinguishes six career-related crises. Of interest in this context is the third transition, "to high-achievement sports and adult sports", and the fourth, "from amateur sports to professional sports". Within these transitions, two characteristics are mentioned. Each is reminiscent of Bloom's (1985) description of the third career stage: "Life subordinated to sport", and "Searching for an individual path in sport". These characteristics can easily be applied to the participating dance students.

In summary, the findings of this research on dance students generally correspond to Bloom's observations. As a final remark, however, it is of interest to underline the fact that in Bloom's sample, there was a majority of males. Only 34 of the 120 talented individuals were female (that is, 28%). In the present sample, the overwhelming majority (nearly 80%) are female, as might be expected in a domain traditionally dominated by females. The present article suggests that Bloom's findings are not just valid for talented male individuals, but might also be used to describe the careers of females.

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